

## My legal Week by Jake, Year 12

On the week commencing the 14th of March, I was fortunate enough to be invited to Corpus Christi College, Oxford for the law residential scheme which they only offer to 30 students per year. Like with all things Oxford, the selection process was rigorous as we had to submit an essay that was to be considered by some of the top legal minds in the country and after weeks of waiting, I was delighted to be informed that I had been commended with a place on the programme. It was only once I arrived that I understood just how fierce the competition for a place had been because the outreach officer at Corpus informed us all that more people had applied for fewer places than those that had applied for the actual law course offered at Oxford and to put that into perspective last year jurisprudence at Oxford received 1899 applicants for around 232 undergraduate degrees! Upon arrival, we were taken through Corpus' beautiful old quad to the "MBI Al Jaber Building", a strikingly modern auditorium where I met my fellow prospective law students who were all incredibly friendly. Not long after the initial "pleased to meet yous" had been uttered, we were ushered into the conference room where we began our first law workshop of the 2-day residential: "Feral Wrong-doers" with Professor Matt Dyson. During this incredibly insightful session, conducted by perhaps the most imposingly intelligent individual which I have ever met, we discussed the law's definition of pets as property and the extent to which their owner is responsible for damages that they can cause. To illustrate the concept of tort law Professor Dyson asked us to determine the potential outcome of a case involving 3 stampeding horses under the "Animals Act 1971", he made the point of telling me specifically that a good lawyer must cite the specific wording of legislation verbatim in order for the meaning and authority of the act to be maintained. This was after our group had determined that spooked horses would not be classed as dangerous animals because they are commonly domesticated in the U.K. when we should have cited section 6 of the statute which defines a dangerous species as one:

(a) which is not commonly domesticated in the British Islands; and

(b) whose fully grown animals normally have such characteristics that they are likely, unless restrained, to cause severe damage or that any damage they may cause is likely to be severe.

It was also fascinating to hear of the funny situations that the law can allow for as illustrated by the 1522 case: *The Rats of Autun*. This is a case where the ecclesiastical courts had finally had enough of the rats pillaging their grain and put them on trial for having "feloniously eaten-up and wantonly destroyed the barley crop." They likely would have been convicted if the court (as was their right) hadn't appointed Barthélemy de Chasseneuz as the rat's defendant. The date for the trial was set but unsurprisingly the rats refused the summons and rather than being tried in absentia Chasseneuz presented a motion for sufficient notice to be given because as he so astutely pointed out that the rats were spread out far and wide across the region, meaning that no single announcement could reach all the defendants. Ergo, to try the rats in absentia was unjust because it contradicted precedent and Roman law. Shockingly, the motion was granted, and the trial details were advertised from virtually every church in the region. Once again, the rats did not answer the summons but once again Chasseneuz had an answer. The rats could not be

expected to traverse hostile territory to reach the location of the court without protection from the enemy which occupies the land- namely, the cats within Autun. If the court could guarantee protection from the cats, then the trial could proceed. It remains unclear whether the rats were acquitted or if the trial was terminated but what is clear is that the law allows for legal manoeuvres that act in favour of a defendant and that Chasseneuz was excellent at making use of them.

After our initial taste of what learning law at Oxford would be like we were thoroughly rattled but were given lunch at Corpus' beautifully ornate dining hall where I was shocked to find that the fellows of the college sit and eat at the very same table as the students- any students, including us... So, there I was sitting across from Professor Dyson and amongst other first years but the initial intimidation, which came so naturally in a room where the eyes of great men and women look down upon you from the paintings which hang on its walls, was completely eradicated by their down to earth nature. I was able to not only ask them about points of the law that were interesting to me and that they were more than well equipped to answer, but I was also able to ask them about their own life story and their own experience with the application process to Oxford. Next, we were given a tour of the college's grounds by the student ambassadors before being taken to our second workshop with Professor Liz Fisher called "Climate Change and the law" and this was of particular interest to me as it is the area of law which I would like to practise in the future. We looked at the necessity of applying context to legislation when analysing it by using the example of the "Climate Change Act 2008" (CCA 2008) and the "Planning Act 2008" (which were passed on the same day) and then applied this to the planning permission which was sought for Heathrow's 5<sup>th</sup> terminal. We had to analyse how the environmental impacts of the proposed plan would affect the environment and if these impacts were lawfully permitted under section 1 of the CCA 2008 which requires a 100% reduction in carbon account from the 1990 target. Professor Fisher concluded by giving the analogy that when people talk about preventing climate change, they often think that they will find a magic wand in a bag deep in some woods that will fix it all with a flick. But this is a mistake. Instead, within the bag, perhaps to their disappointment, they will find laws; pieces of legislation that will be able to help reduce climate change, and in this way environmental law can help combat the climate crisis. All in all, this concluded the academic aspects of my first day on the law residential as we were then given free time to explore the wonderful city of Oxford with my peers and once, we returned we had another session with Professor Dyson where we legislated crime by writing out our own statute which pertained to the liability of damages for children who unknowingly and unintentionally damage another person's property. It was a real challenge to find the exact wording that was required for our piece of legislation to include liability for everything that we deemed it should whilst precluding instances which we would reasonably not say a person is liable for. The challenge of semantics is a recurring theme that I noticed during my legal week as the changing of one word can mean the difference between being found guilty or not guilty.

The next morning, after breakfasting in the dining hall, we had a closing discussion with Professor Liz Fisher before being taken to Oxford's Faculty of Law where we took part in the faculty taster day. Here we learnt some very interesting admissions stats about the faculty, one that stands out is that Oxford's Law course is rather rigid with only two optional modules. Then, Professor Matt Dyson concluded by giving us

a taste of some pressing matters in the field of criminal law. Now, this might seem like a busy two days, but I had also scheduled work experience at Cornerstone Barristers in Gray's Inn commencing the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, thanks to the Mr Beaney's connections. Here I spent 2 days shadowing an excellent barrister and was thrown right into the deep end when I was given a 46-page Court of Appeal case summary, which Cornerstone had played a major role in, and asked to give my opinion on the judgement. The case in question is known as Sarah Finch vs Surrey County Council (CC) 2022 and concerns the previous ruling of Mr Justice Holgate to permit the extraction of oil from land belonging to the county. Sarah Finch had argued that Surrey CC had acted unlawfully in omitting scope 3 emission (emission that result of activities from assets not owned or controlled by the reporting organization, i.e., burning of oil as petrol) from the Environmental Impact Directive (EIA) as required by article 1 of the "EIA Directive 2014." However, the case was dismissed 2-1 but I would agree with Lord Justice Moylan's dissenting opinion that downstream emissions are a "significant and likely impact" of the development and so in the future should be assessed by other proposed developments because the essential character of oil extraction is to receive the financial compensation of selling the oil for its use as a fuel source. The next day, I was given a "brief to counsel" by my fictional client Gray's Inn CC who were asking for legal advice as to the powers they had to remove protestors from their land. After arduous research, I found that section 59 of the "Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014" allowed for local authorities to introduce public spaces protection order (PSPO) if satisfied on reasonable grounds that the activities carried on in a public place within the authority's area have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality and that they are likely to continue. This power would help my client (Gray's Inn CC) in dealing with the noise complaints raised by the local residents because the noise of the protest could indeed be argued to have negatively affected the quality of life in the locality and so a PSPO can prohibit the protest from being continued, it is safe to say I put into practice what I learnt at Oxford.

Overall, I am incredibly grateful to Beths for allowing me to undergo this week of legal work experience as it has been a great opportunity to grasp what studying and practising the law will entail as these experiences have only increased my interest in the career path.

